

Use: Public access to the west beach of Sugar Island Unit

Refuge Name: Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge

Establishing and Acquisition Authority(ies):

The Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge Establishment Act, HR 1230 (P.L. 107-91), and the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Complex Expansion and Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge Expansion Act, HR 289 (P.L. 108-23).

Refuge Purpose(s):

To protect the remaining high-quality fish and wildlife habitats of the Detroit River before they are lost to further development and to restore and enhance degraded wildlife habitats associated with the Detroit River.

To assist in international efforts to conserve, enhance, and restore the native aquatic and terrestrial community characteristics of the Detroit River (including associated fish, wildlife, and plant species) both in the United States and Canada.

To facilitate partnerships among the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Canadian national and provincial authorities, State and local governments, local communities in the United States and in Canada, conservation organizations, and other non-Federal entities to promote public awareness of the resources of the Detroit River.

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:

The Mission is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.

Description of Use:

Public use of the west beach of Sugar Island Unit, Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge for sunbathing, picnicking, volleyball, and other family oriented beach activities.

Prohibitions on the island would include: fires, alcohol, camping, glass containers, littering, fireworks, public access to concrete piers, staging for scuba diving, and unleashed pets.

(a) What is the use?

Public use of the west beach of Sugar Island in addition to hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental education, and environmental

interpretation. This includes sunbathing, picnicking, volleyball, and other family oriented beach activities.

Is the use a priority public use?

This additional public use is not a priority public use in the National Wildlife Refuge System.

(b) Where would the use be conducted?

West beach of Sugar Island Unit of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge.

(c) When would the use be conducted?

The use would be conducted during daylight hours from the first Saturday prior to Memorial Day through Labor Day.

(d) How would the use be conducted?

The west beach area opened for public use would be clearly marked with signs. A single panel kiosk would be located at the west beach to: inform visitors about the rules and regulations; interpret the Detroit River IWR in the context of the National Wildlife Refuge System; educate visitors about the ecological significance of Sugar Island; and inform visitors about the island's unique history. Prohibitions on the island would include: fires, alcohol, camping, glass containers, littering, fireworks, public access to concrete piers, staging for scuba diving, and unleashed pets. Volleyball, sunbathing, picnicking, and other family oriented beach activities on the west beach only would be allowed. No bathroom facilities or trash receptacles would be provided. A "tip line" telephone number will be provided on the kiosk to report problems and violations.

(e) Why is this use being proposed?

This use is being proposed because many local citizens and organizations have expressed a desire for access to Sugar Island.

Sugar Island was purchased in April 2012 for inclusion into the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. It was opened to the public for hunting in Fall 2012 as set forth in Title 50, Code of Federal Regulations, and described in the Refuge Hunting Map and Regulations Brochure. Hunting was allowed through the approved Hunting Plan for the Detroit River IWR, which has preceded the completion of the Visitor Services Plan. Additional public use of the island, deemed compatible with the Refuge's mission, must be evaluated as required by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) through an Environmental Assessment. Implementation of the proposed actions will be consistent and compatible with the Refuge Recreation Act, Refuge Administration Act, and the Detroit River IWR CCP.

On June 18, 2012, the Service held a Sugar Island Public Forum to articulate the Service's position on Sugar Island and obtain input. Points of emphasis from public participants included:

- Sugar Island represents the only sand beaches on the U.S. side of the lower Detroit River;
- Many people spend time with family on Sugar Island and picnicking and partying has been cultural on the island for decades;
- The public, to date, feels that they have had no voice in the decisions for Sugar Island;
- Forum participants noted that there has been confusion over enforcement regarding the location of the water's edge;
- The public wants consistency in enforcement – the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reiterated their position of enforcement to the water's edge (the public was given assurance that standing in the water and anchoring a boat in the water was legal and acceptable);
- Members of the public felt that they were taxpayers and that it was inconsistent that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service intends to allow hunting, but not picnicking;
- The boating community feels disenfranchised (by losing public access to Sugar Island);
- The public asked why Sugar Island couldn't be opened (dawn to dusk, no campfires, no camping, etc.) similar to Celeron Island (also located at the mouth of the Detroit River) that is owned by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources;
- Forum participants requested the process of developing a Visitor Services Plan be expedited, including the exploration of a "win-win" solution for Sugar Island where wildlife and habitats were protected, and some responsible public access was offered; and
- Participants requested that the Service obtain a legal opinion (i.e., Solicitor's opinion) regarding whether or not the public has a right to public access on Sugar Island up to the ordinary high water mark.

On September 25, 2012, the Service held a Sugar Island Public Use Workshop at the Grosse Ile Middle School to receive additional public input on public use of Sugar Island and explore options. Over 60 people attended and participated in nine breakout sessions.

Availability of Resources:

The resources required to facilitate the use are increased boundary signage, a barrier fence to the upland, and an information kiosk. The cost of the equipment is approximately \$5,000. The cost of staff time is approximately \$10,000. Additional law enforcement is anticipated.

How does this use affect Refuge purposes and the NWRS mission?

This additional public use of Sugar Island does not counter the purposes for which the Refuge was established. The use directly supports the Refuge purpose by "promoting

public awareness of the resources of the Detroit River”. This awareness will come from the public observing the wildlife and viewing some of the habitats of Sugar Island without negatively impacting them.

How does this use affect fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats; and the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the refuge/NWRS?

The habitats and associated biota on the west beach would be impacted by foot traffic and disturbance, but the east beach would be left undisturbed. Additional public use on the beach would not be equivalent to the threat of invasive plant species, which the Refuge will need to manage. All upland habitat would be protected and all beach habitat would be protected on the east side of the island.

Biological impacts would be minor to negligible from this alternative. Foot traffic would be limited to the west beach. Some native plant species (*Scirpus* sp., *Equisetum* sp., *Potentilla anserina*, etc.) may be negatively impacted by public use of the west beach, but these communities are represented on the other east sand beach. It is reasonable to assume boisterous activity would occur and would alter wildlife use of the west beach area on the island, but would not be significant to any species on the island. However, public use on the west beach would have little impact to most migratory birds during stopover or breeding birds.

Access to only one beach eliminates potential negative impacts to habitat and wildlife on the uplands and allows the east beach to remain without foot traffic to ensure no impact to beach plant species, while simultaneously allowing public access to the larger and most accessible beach. Limiting public use to the west beach would eliminate habitat degradation in the uplands associated with visitors using uplands as an open bathroom.

There are no known listed, proposed, and candidate species on Sugar Island at this time.

Public Review and Comment:

Determination:

☐ Use is Not Compatible

☒ Use is Compatible with Following Stipulations

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

To ensure compatibility with National Wildlife Refuge System and Detroit River IWR goals and objectives, the activity can only occur under the following stipulations:

1) Increased signage and a barrier fence would be installed to clearly demarcate the uplands which are closed to public use except for hunting.

- 2) Prohibitions on the island would include: fires, alcohol, camping, glass containers, littering, fireworks, public access to concrete piers, staging for scuba diving, and unleashed pets.
- 3) No bathroom facilities or trash receptacles would be provided.
- 4) A “tip line” telephone number will be provided on the kiosk to report problems and violations.
- 5) A single panel kiosk would be located at the west beach to: inform visitors about the rules and regulations; interpret the Detroit River IWR in the context of the National Wildlife Refuge System; educate visitors about the ecological significance of Sugar Island; and inform visitors about the island’s unique history.

Justification: It is therefore determined that this activity is compatible with the purposes of the National Wildlife Refuge System and the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. Allowing this activity to occur will promote public awareness of the Detroit River. Not allowing this activity would result in a reduction of public appreciation and awareness of the Detroit River, and an erosion of public commitment to stewardship of the lower Detroit River’s natural areas. This negative result does not lead to a commensurate level of protection of native habitat. The result may lead to reduced public support of the Refuge and its purpose.

Signature: Refuge Manager _____
(Signature and Date)

Concurrence: Regional Chief _____
(Signature and Date)

Mandatory 10- or 15-year Re-evaluation Date: _____